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TAGS: PREL KPKO UN SU
SUBJECT: FM AKOL TELLS NATSIOS SUDAN IS OPEN FOR DIALOGUE
ON INTERNATIONAL FORCES

Classified By: Acting P/E Chief Michael Honigstein, Reason: Section 1.4
(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The Sudanese government wants to engage in more constructive dialogue and will show flexibility on international forces supplementing an African Union (AU) mission to improve bilateral relations, according to Foreign Minister Lam Akol. Special Presidential Envoy (SPE) Andrew Natsios met with Akol on 14 October. On Darfur, Akol said the government completely accepts the proposals outlined in a recent letter from UN Secretary General (SYG) Kofi Annan and AU Chairman Alpha Oumar Konaré, known as AU Plus, and would discuss an international force composed of Africans and Muslims. Members of the government genuinely fear U.S. ulterior motives, according to Akol, largely because of the lack of direct communication from the USG. On the issues of travel restrictions, Akol said that he understands limiting the President's visa was a mistake and has recommended that the Presidency lift the 25 mile limitation imposed on Americans. END SUMMARY.

International Forces Possible, But Under AU

¶2. (C) SPE Natsios opened by pointing out that Sudanese relations with the U.S., Europe and Africa were deteriorating over Darfur, and the Arabs were increasingly unhappy. However, he explained that he was not delivering any ultimatums, only listening. While the U.S. remains committed to 1706, Natsios emphasized, Bashir's objections are noted and the U.S. priorities are size, competence, funding and mandate, and not language. Natsios requested details on international forces acceptable to Sudan: numbers, roles, equipment, and ethnic/religious composition. The AU voluntary funding model is not sustainable, Natsios cautioned, and only the UN's compulsory dues model ensures sustainability

¶3. (C) Akol replied that Sudan was willing to discuss specifics of an AU Plus force during this visit. There was a great deal of fear, Akol explained, over hidden motives for a UN transition, specifically regime change. Natsios underlined that there was no hidden agenda and no plans for regime change. These fears were fueled, according to Akol, by the U.S. behavior in the UN. After showing Sudan a P-3 draft of UNSCR 1706, the U.S. had then pushed through a final version that was even worse. The addition of text on reform of the judiciary, police, and border protection was unacceptable. Akol said the AU also has problems with 1706 because it lacks the basic conditions for transition: consent of Sudan, a majority African force, and African leadership. Akol thinks the AU may be telling different things to Sudan and the U.S., but the 3-month AU extension gives room to talk. Akol also commented that the signing of the Darfur Peace and

Security Act on the same day as Natsios' arrival seemed like a message, but he accepted Natsios' explanation that the time was about to expire for signature and that the timing was just unfortunate.

DPA Needs Strengthening, Starting With Ceasefire

¶4. (C) SPE Natsios said that while there was some room for dialogue, nothing could be accomplished without a ceasefire and improvement of the humanitarian situation. Akol agreed but said that the ceasefire must be on both sides, and that the Sudanese Army needed to defend itself against the National Redemption Front (NRF). The NRF had become emboldened, Akol said, after the South Kordofan attacks because there was no international condemnation, and the NRF still receives significant support from Chad, Eritrea, and others. Natsios noted that a complete ceasefire was necessary, but the government would be held responsible for any atrocities. Self-defense is one thing, Natsios warned, but attacking a civilian population, burning villages, and raping women is not acceptable for any reason. Akol responded that the situation in Darfur was not as bad as many reports indicated, and that violence was limited to a few areas in North Darfur and the border with Chad.

¶5. (C) The big question, Akol said, was how to get the non-signatories to accept the DPA as that was the only way to really implement peace. Akol accepted that the only solution was political, and said that many groups could be accommodated without renegotiating the DPA. For example, the groups calling for compensation could easily be appeased by increasing the compensation fund. Other groups, however, would be more difficult to get on board.

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¶6. (C) COMMENT: In a one-on-one discussion following the general meeting, Akol told Natsios that Bashir is being influenced by a strong inner circle, which he did not name, and that often Bashir seems reasonable but then changed his position after meeting this group. This group is thought to be led by Presidential Assistant Nafie al Nafi. END COMMENT.

¶7. (U) Special Presidential Envoy Andrew Natsios has cleared this cable.

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